

Jesus' Sorrow for Jerusalem
Luke 13:31 – 35
February 28, 2010

Today's Scripture reading comes from the thirteenth chapter of Luke's gospel, verses 31 through 35. Please listen for the reading of God's Word for the people of God.

³¹At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."

³²He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' ³³In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"

³⁴"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! ³⁵Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray:

Our God, we are sorry for the sins of our heart, our mind and our soul and seek enlightenment from your teachings today. In choosing to do wrong we fail to do good, we sin against you and fail to love you as we should. Teach us, guide us and direct us today in the meditations of our heart and through the words of my lips. In Christ Holy name, our God, have mercy. Amen.

Last week's reading offered us an opportunity to revisit briefly the baptism of Jesus and to experience the compulsory call by the Holy Spirit that lead Jesus into the desert to allow him time to prepare for the ministry to which he was about to begin. The forty days that Jesus spent in the desert taught us much about our own need to prepare for the work to which God has called each of us and gave us a good model to follow when we ourselves are tempted by the enemy. Dr. Charles Stanley instructs that we should *run* whenever we are faced with temptation and I think that is pretty good advice. Whenever we are faced with a situation we know we are not suppose to be in or is not good for us, we should run away and run fast until we are far away from the thing that tempts us. However, Jesus has taught us that running is not always an option

and when we are faced with the enemy we have two very strong and powerful elements on which to rely; the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

In this morning's reading, we are one step closer to Jerusalem, one week closer to Good Friday and one week closer to Easter. In this morning's reading we hear of Jesus beginning his trip to Jerusalem. Jesus has already begun his ministry and is moving out from the margins of the empire in Galilee and moving towards the center of regional power and Jewish Heritage; he is headed to Jerusalem. Each stop along the way to the big city offers us an opportunity to learn more about our responsibility as Christians and our eventual roll as followers of Christ. In following Jesus on his path to Jerusalem we are learning the same lessons that the disciples themselves are being taught and so the Season of Lent not only offers us a time of repentance but also an awareness of the importance of repentance which brings each of us closer to renewed relationship with our Creator and our God. We are on our way to reconciliation during this Seasonal Exodus and Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem; the place where the Great Temple of both biblical meaning and history lies; the center of Roman regional control and the eventual place where Jesus will face his death.

It would be easy during this Season to get caught up in the end of the journey. It is, however, the single most important event in Christian History so why not get caught up in the moment? Though the ending is vitally important to us, I believe we must recall the words of Ecclesiastes 3:1 which reminds each of us, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven." So here we are reminded that the journey can be and is as important as the destination itself; much like the journey of life itself. It has been asked for centuries by Christians whether or not Jesus knew from the beginning whether he would face death upon arriving in Jerusalem and equally debated is the question as to who should be blamed

for the death of Christ. Both questions are valid in some arenas, I suppose, but I hesitate to see how these are appropriate questions for us during a time and Season of reflection and repentance. Perhaps we can investigate these questions during our Tuesdays Together this week, but as for this morning I want to look more closely at the words in our reading today and what they have to offer each of us for lives.

I have to say that when I read this morning's reading this week I was a little taken back. I am not a complete novice to the Word of God and consider myself to be fairly well read but this passage was not one that was familiar to me. For the first time in quite awhile I felt a little nervous about preparing for this morning's sermon. It isn't uncommon for Jesus to show us his human side as he becomes troubled by the religious leaders of his time. Tossing over tables in the temple and cursing the fig tree in the garden are two very familiar instances when Jesus showed a great deal of human reaction and emotion. But today's reading is one that I've either never read before or at least have never given much thought to, at least not until this week.

Look again at the opening words of today's reading. Did you notice in this morning's text that sympathetic Pharisees were warning Jesus of danger? "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." While the term "Pharisee" often refers to those who opposed Jesus mission, we also know that there were sympathetic Pharisees, like Joseph of Arimathea, who would eventually provide a burial for Jesus and then there was Nicodemus, who would become a follower of Christ. These Pharisees have been hearing the rumblings amongst other Pharisees and other leaders, and now seek to warn Jesus. They knew that the centers of power are starting to fear Jesus message.

Who is this Jesus in Galilee? What of these miracles we hear him doing. Is it true that he proclaimed that he himself has fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah; what does that mean; is he saying

he is the Messiah? Is he going to incite rebellion? Will this Jesus bring the wrath of Herod and Roman oppression down upon us? What must we do to keep peace?

I love Jesus' reaction to their warnings. The power and authority with which Jesus responds is the same sort of power and authority with which he spoke to Satan in the desert, only this time there is a slightly more emotional tinge in his response. This time Jesus is not being tempted, but rather he and his entire mission and ministry is being brought into question. I can't help but think that this is the *more opportune time* that Satan was said to be waiting for in last week's reading.

I don't know about many of you here today, but I probably would have been tempted to take Dr. Stanley's advice right about now and begin running, but Jesus doesn't do so. Instead of heading for the hills to hide he sends a beautiful and seeming ominously cryptic message to Herod, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day — for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"

Here in our gospel story the plot begins to thicken just a little. Jesus has been warned; the forces of destruction and the powers of this world have begun to join forces against Jesus. It is as if they are saying to Jesus, "Do as we say or you will be killed. Conform to our rules and our ways or suffer the consequences." If this were a typical Hollywood movie, some directors would have Jesus break into a long speech about how he is determined to let nothing dissuade him. With an intense change in the mood of the background music – possibly with drums rolling – we'd be offered a close up of Jesus with a clenched jaw and steely eyes saying, "Tell Herod that I have not yet begun to fight."

Of course this reference doesn't really work for me. I envision Jesus using this moment as much about teaching his disciple's as he does in carrying out his call. The words of our favorite Duchess of Protocol, Ms. Noxema Jackson come to mind for me as she teaches Chi Chi step two to utter fabulousness; *Ignore Adversity*. And yet, neither of these portrayals is the path that Christ takes.

Jesus responds in a way that is nothing like what our century expects of a hero. He responds with lamentations, with mourning, with tears, with sadness and most importantly with love. Jesus is the very incarnation of God, after all and we have already learned in preparing for Lent that God is love (John) Here Jesus shows those who persecute him the very nature of his being. Jesus shows them love; love for those who have turned against their Creator, love for the people of Jerusalem, love for the Pharisees and especially love for *all* the people of God. Jesus says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" These words are a direct reference to the Covenants offered to mankind through Moses, David and Abraham.

We so often refer to God as our Father, but here we see Jesus reaching out to his people with a more tender love of a mother rather than the disciplining hand of a father. He reaches out to embrace them and to keep them from destruction and harm. God our Creator, Jesus Christ our Redeemer and the Holy Spirit our Sustainer work so closely and intimately together, like a well oiled machine, with one mission and one purpose in mind – to bring to the people of God a message of radically inclusive love.

The ministry of Christ, ordained by God, was so radical and so different than what the people had come to know through tradition. I once asked our Tuesdays Together group if they

thought that Jesus had to die on the cross. Here in today's scripture I think we have biblical support that the answer to that question would be *no*. No, Jesus didn't have to die. But we – and by *we* I mean we, all of humanity in our refusal to accept the message that Christ brings to each and everyone one of us has forced Christ death as the only means to reconciliation with our Creator.

The people of creation who lived before and during the day of Christ forced his eventual physical death but each of us who have since lived after his death and resurrection continue to crucify our risen savior each and every day as we refuse to again accept what Christ offers us and that is the radically inclusive message of love offer to us by God our Creator through the very teachings and ministry of God's one and only Son Jesus Christ spoken to us today through the power of the Holy Spirit.

I had the misfortune this week of being witnessed to by a salesman at one of our local hardware stores as he began to tell me of his pride filled experience in teaching Sunday school at his church last Sunday. He told me that he had never been much of a teacher but rather he was more of a preacher and that the anointing had fallen on him during their morning lesson and he gave them an earful about the moral turpitude of today's culture that was beginning to tear our world apart. Do you know where I am going with this? He said that it was becoming criminal to preach against homosexuality and that if he had broken any laws in doing so then he was proud to have done so. "Sin is sin", he said and he felt a moral obligation to preach it like he read and understood it.

Here is another time I took the advice of Dr. Stanley and I quickly thanked him for his time and I ran. The temptation I faced was to get into a heated debate with this man and I didn't feel well equipped to hold my own. Not that I don't believe what he was saying was and is

innately ignorant and wrong, but I didn't think I have could pointed out the error of his understanding without allowing my anger and disgust to take over. In other words, I had visions of cracking him over the head with a baseball bat and that didn't seem like the most Christian thing to do at the time. So I walked away.

Jesus is telling the religious leaders of his day the same message that I want to communicate to you today. Jesus' says, "How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" Next time I am confronted with feelings of physical violence in defense of my understanding of my God, I hope that I will remember these words from Jesus. God wants so much to gather all creation together under a single wing and so many of us are just not willing to do so. The bible teaches us that so many today who believe themselves to be the children of God will be left unnoticed in the time of Christ second coming. Equally important to note is that so many of us who have been deemed unworthy, marginalized and forgotten by the world will *not* be unnoticed in the final days leading up to Christ return. And so I urge each and everyone one of you today to look not to those around you with judgment and dissention, but to look deep within yourselves for God's message and call on your life.

So here's the deal folks, "Are you ready?" Are you ready to accept that God does indeed truly love you and that Jesus Christ was sent with a message just for you? The message is not about the sins of those around you but rather it is about reconciliation of redemption from the sins within each of us. Stop preaching hate, stop judging those around you and start sharing the love of God with everyone you meet; but not before you have accepted that love for yourself. If ever there is a time to be just a little selfish, now is the time. Cast aside your earthly concerns for just a moment and get right with God.

As we stand together and sing our sermon hymn, God of this City, know that each and every one of you are part of this city, this community of faith and especially this community as a whole. This altar is open this morning for anyone who needs a time of special prayer or reflection. Please take a moment to look deep within your own heart and take advantage of what God is offering you today. Amen!